

MISSOURI

CONSERVATIONIST

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Issue 10



The Bridges' Place

My wife and I own 180 acres of wild land in the Ozarks. We call it "The Bridges' Place," out of respect to Andrew Johnston Bridges who built his homestead there in the 1800s. Today, the only evidence of early settlement is a log, "dog trot" house—two rooms with a breezeway between them. There is no one left to tell how or when the pine logs were hewn from tall trees and fitted together, but this landmark reminds us of the pioneer craftsmen who resided here.

The Bridges' Place is a long way from our home, and we don't visit as often as we would like. We try to go there at least once a season, and soon after we arrive we always take a long walk with the hope that we will see a rare creature or plant, perhaps a bear or a lady slipper orchid. I usually have my camera in hand, but I have never been satisfied with the pictures I've taken because they fail to capture the depth of the experience.

If I had to pick only one season for The Bridges' Place field trip, it would be autumn, and October would be my favorite month. It's gorgeous outdoors in October, especially where Missouri's colorful fall foliage is in full display. Many of Missouri's oak species are represented on the Bridges' Place, as well as maple, hickory, dogwood, sassafras, sycamore, gum, ash, and others. The variety of color displayed by these hardwood species blends perfectly with the green of short-leaf pines scattered among them.

Like many Missourians who own parcels of land, we like the feeling of both freedom and responsibility to do what we think is right on the property. We are both consumptive and non-consumptive users of this land, and I see no inconsistency in this. I experience as much pleasure from identifying song birds as I do hunting deer with my sons. Full-fledged outdoors people can and should develop multiple uses of land and natural resources.



Many landowners have little experience managing for wildlife, and we find ourselves in need of information before we can make decisions. Today's federal and state programs designed to assist landowners with conservation practices are complex enough to challenge the understanding of anyone unfamiliar with them.

To serve private landowners like us, the Department of Conservation provides advice and technical support free of charge. Missouri Department of Conservation employees have made it their business to understand those programs and opportunities so that they can help us use them to make conservation practices happen on our land, if that is what we want.

The Bridges' Place is about 80 percent forest and 20 percent open fields with a small, wet-weather stream running through it. Heeding some good advice, we have planted a variety of trees in a narrow strip adjacent to the creek to reforest the stream corridor. We renovated one pond for wildlife watering and to provide habitat for amphibians. We also plan to renovate another. We want to keep the balance of the fields open to provide edge habitat, cover and food for quail and other wildlife. Restoration of native grasses is a project for tomorrow.

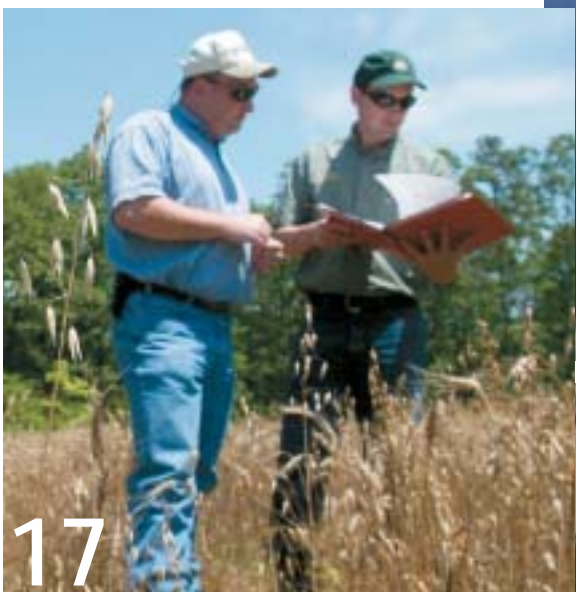
If you own some acreage, you may need help in fulfilling your vision and the responsibilities we share to provide for Mother Nature. Department of Conservation employees are here to serve. Please call us. We would be glad to help you achieve your conservation goals on your property. This service is hugely important to us as conservation professionals, and to everyone who cares about our fish, forests and wildlife.

John D. Hoskins
Director

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A flock of mallards
photographed by Jim Rathert

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RIDING ALONG

June's Vantage Point column, in which John Hoskins talked about Chet Barnes, brought back special memories to me. I remember when Chet was the refuge manager at Big Springs State Park. My father, Charles Baker, had the same position at Sam A. Baker State Park.

When the deer trapping was in full swing, Chet and my dad would meet to consolidate their load for transporting to a release site, and I would ride along. Growing up in a game refuge was a unique experience that I will always treasure.

Don E. Baker, Branson

LURE-STRUCK

I stared at your August cover for half an hour before even opening the magazine. Congratulations to Cliff White for an outstanding photo.

Rick Ehrhard

Your cover photo of the old fishing lures brought back memories for me of what was in my father's tackle box when I was learning to use a casting rod.

This was the summer after Eisenhower's second inaugural. We were floating a river in southern Missouri, probably the Jack's Fork, and he snapped a big Dowagiac Minnow onto his line. These are shown in the bottom row, third and fifth from the left. I don't have any, but a lot of the other lures are in my tackle box, which might be worth a fortune if I could just find it.

Jim Caplan, Columbia

I want to compliment your publication on the wonderful cover picture and inside story. I'm not a fisherman (yet), but I am an antique dealer. The pictures were so attractive I read the whole article.

Bernice Dickson, Sunrise Beach

I would like to identify someone in one of your old pictures. My uncle's brother, Ernest Houseworth, is in the photo on page 27, in the "License to Fish" article. He was born and raised around Versailles and farmed and died there. I was greatly surprised to see him and told all of his family about the picture.

Shirley Simmons, Warrensburg

EAT SQUEAT!

In one of your articles about squirrels, the author mentioned that there are some people who won't eat furry creatures. I think it would be good marketing to create a name for the meat like we have with beef, pork and venison. I propose calling squirrel meat "squeat."

Felicia Williams, New York, NY

HOME-GROWN WORMS

This works for worms. Dig a 4-foot square hole 1 foot deep in your backyard. Place a layer of leaves 2 inches deep. Pour three cans of corn, green beans and mixed vegetables over the leaves and cover with 2 inches of dirt mixed with leaves.

Every day for about a week, throw in all garbage and coffee grounds cov-

ering them with leaves and dirt. When the hole is full, cover it with leaves and give it a good watering down, then sprinkle it good three times a week.

In about three weeks, you will have the best nightcrawlers, earthworms and red wigglers you've ever seen. I know, I've had them for years.

Jack Besenger, Farmington

STOP THE MUSIC

In your June issue, you told how to clean frog legs, but you didn't tell the cook how to keep them from dancing in the skillet or pan. If you pull out the heavy cord, they will not dance in the pan.

Mary Lynch, Mack's Creek

PICTURE POOR

The *Conservationist* must have run out of pictures because the deer on the back cover of the August issue is the poorest condition deer you have ever published.

Larry Schuster, Harrisonville

Editor's note: The deer isn't in poor condition. Instead, the deer is in transition between its summer coat and winter coat. This usually occurs in August. By now, the deer's coat almost certainly is lustrous and thick.

FRAMED

I have read your magazine for years, and the August issue that arrived today is the very best ever! I am an avid collector of old things, so the cover was awesome. In fact I may frame it.

Peggy King, Republic

TURKEY FINDER

I didn't see a turkey creek in Cedar County on the map in John Lewis' article. We lived south of Turkey Creek Conservation Area in Cedar County.

Charles Hutchins, Marshfield

Editor's note: We goofed. The graphic should have shown a triangle in St. Clair County, designating a Turkey Creek originating in Carter county.



RED-HANDED

"We thought we had a tomato thief in the neighborhood," wrote Sandra Rudy of Parkville. She later saw this squirrel take a tomato out of the garden and run up the telephone pole with it. She caught the thief red-handed in this photo.

Ask the Ombudsman

Q: I don't understand why I have to declare a unit for my bonus permits during the November and muzzleloading portions of the deer season. If you can use a permit with any unit number during the December portion, why can't you do that the rest of the season?



A: The past several years we've been seeing regulation liberalizations, but our management also must allow for future regulation changes that may result due to a drop in deer numbers. The system in place now can be adjusted to limit the take of antlerless deer should that become necessary. The Conservation Department believes that keeping this system is a simpler solution than doing away with it and then trying to put it back in place at a later time.

During the earlier portions of the season, hunters are required to opt for specific units. This spreads out hunter pressure and results in a more even harvest of does. However, due to a regulation change, many units have unlimited second bonus permits which will allow those wanting to hunt multiple units an opportunity to do so prior to the December portion of the season.

During the December antlerless portion of the season hunters have the opportunity to fill unused any-deer and/or bonus permits in any unit that's open (units 1-27, 33-38, 58 and 59) regardless of the unit number on their permits. Lower hunter numbers during this part of the season make this possible.

Please note that some conservation areas have regulations more restrictive than the unit in which they are located. Many allow hunting for antlered deer only, some only allow archery methods, others are closed to deer hunting. For details on conservation area regulations, contact the appropriate Conservation Department regional office or enter www.sos.mo.gov/adrules/csr/current/3csr/3c10-11.pdf into your web browser.

Please buy your deer hunting permits early.

Ombudsman Ken Drenon will respond to your questions, suggestions or complaints concerning Conservation Department programs. Write him at P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180, call him at 573/751-4115, ext. 3848, or e-mail him at drenok@mdc.state.mo.us.

PEARL MAKERS

Your "Making Mussels" article was interesting. While living in Japan during the occupation days, my wife and I visited a pearl farm. Our guide was

very happy to tell us that the seed pearls planted in their oysters were small pieces of shell obtained from mussels from the Mississippi River.

Zell and Alberta Goodwin, Bolivar

The letters printed here reflect readers' opinions about the Conservationist and its contents. Space limitations prevent us from printing all letters, but we welcome signed comments from our readers. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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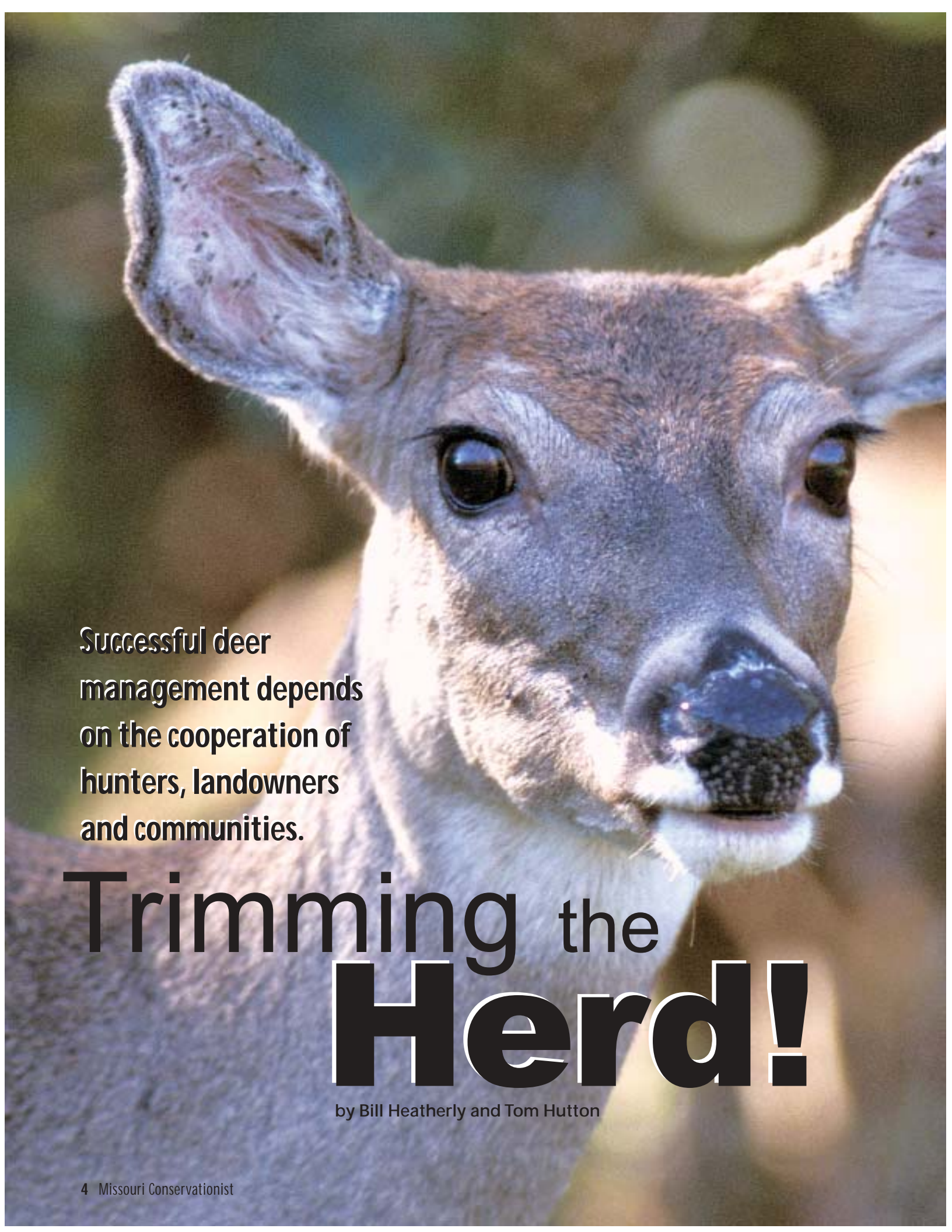
CIRCULATION Laura Scheuler

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Successful deer
management depends
on the cooperation of
hunters, landowners
and communities.

Trimming the **Herd!**

by Bill Heatherly and Tom Hutton



Every day, sometimes many times in the day, we answer the phone and immediately hear the question: "Why don't you do something about the deer herd?"

Some people ask that question believing there aren't enough deer. They want to know what's being done to increase deer numbers. Others believe there are too many deer and want to know what the Conservation Department is doing to reduce deer numbers. This perfectly illustrates the challenge of modern-day deer management. We're constantly trying to find a balance between one person's "too many" and the next person's "not enough." To complicate the matter, those two people might even be neighbors.

Although Missouri is currently home to nearly a million deer, the biological carrying capacity, the number of deer that the habitat can support, has not yet been reached. However, the cultural carrying capacity, or the number of deer that people will tolerate, has generally been reached, and in some areas, exceeded.

The Department of Conservation periodically asks two important groups of Missourians their opinion regarding deer numbers. A survey conducted in 2000 revealed that 88 percent of landowners who generate some income from their property "enjoy" having deer present on their land. Although 43 percent thought there are "more" deer now than five years ago, 65 percent said the number of deer was "about right" or "too few." Twenty-eight percent of those landowners believed there were "too many" deer, but only 8 percent classified deer as a "nuisance."

As you might expect, Missouri's 425,000 firearms deer hunters have somewhat different opinions. A 2002 season survey revealed that 85 percent of firearms deer hunters thought the number of deer to be "about right" or "too few." And although 21 percent believed there are "more" deer now than five years ago, only 9 percent believed there were "too many."

Regardless of your opinion, there is no question that deer numbers can sometimes be above desired levels in some areas.

What are the possible consequence of too many deer? Overbrowsing of forests can virtually eliminate desirable understory plants and prevent their regeneration, resulting in long-term changes in forest composition. Damage to agricultural crops, fruit orchards, commercial nurseries, and Christmas tree farms can mean significant financial losses for the owners. Residents in urban and suburban areas can experience damage to vegetable and flower gardens, and expensive ornamental plants. And one seemingly universal concern is the incidence of deer-vehicle accidents.

In 2001, there were 8,199 deer-vehicle accidents reported in Missouri. In comparison, Illinois typically reports about 17,000 such accidents each year, Wisconsin about 40,000, and Michigan more than 65,000. Of course, such comparisons are of little consolation when it is your vehicle that is involved. Regardless, the

Deer are an important part of Missouri's natural environment, but too many deer can cause major problems. Regulated hunting helps control deer populations, but hunters must be willing to harvest female deer, or does.

Jim Rathert



Harvesting does is critical in managing deer numbers in terms of both biological and social carrying capacity. Reducing deer populations by increasing the doe harvest will help reduce deer damage to crops (overleaf, right) and the frequency of deer/vehicle collisions. Taking does also allows bucks a better chance of surviving long enough to grow trophy racks.

Cliff White

number of deer-vehicle accidents reported in Missouri each year has remained relatively constant over the past decade even as the number of roads, traffic volume, and speed limits increased.

Over the past several years, as the deer herd has increased, the Missouri Department of Conservation has liberalized regulations to increase hunting opportunity and put more permits into the hands of hunters. For example, both the firearms and archery seasons have been lengthened, and more bonus permits have been made available for more units.

In 1996, a new Antlerless-Only portion of the firearms season was established, and in 2002 hunters were allowed to use their Any-Deer permits to take a deer anywhere in Missouri. In addition, the number of units where Antlerless-Only Archery Deer Hunting permits are valid has steadily increased.

Nearly 42 million acres, or about 93 percent, of Missouri's landscape is privately owned. Therefore, private landowners play a crucial role in deer herd management. In recognition and appreciation of the significant contributions that they make to Missouri's wildlife, qualifying private landowners have traditionally been allowed to harvest deer during both the firearms and archery seasons without purchasing any permits. Although regulations must be revised periodically to keep pace with the changing deer herd and new management goals, we intend for the landowner privilege to continue, although perhaps with some modification.

Exactly how do hunters fit in? Because there are fewer natural predators today than in pre-settlement times, regulated sport hunting is the best way to control deer numbers. Without hunting, deer management and population control would be impossible.

Beginning in 1944 when the "modern" deer season was established, hunting was for bucks only. Does were protected so deer numbers could increase. This strategy was very effective, and by 1951 deer numbers had rebounded sufficiently to allow a number of "any deer" days in parts of Missouri. Further liberalizations were implemented as the deer herd continued to grow.

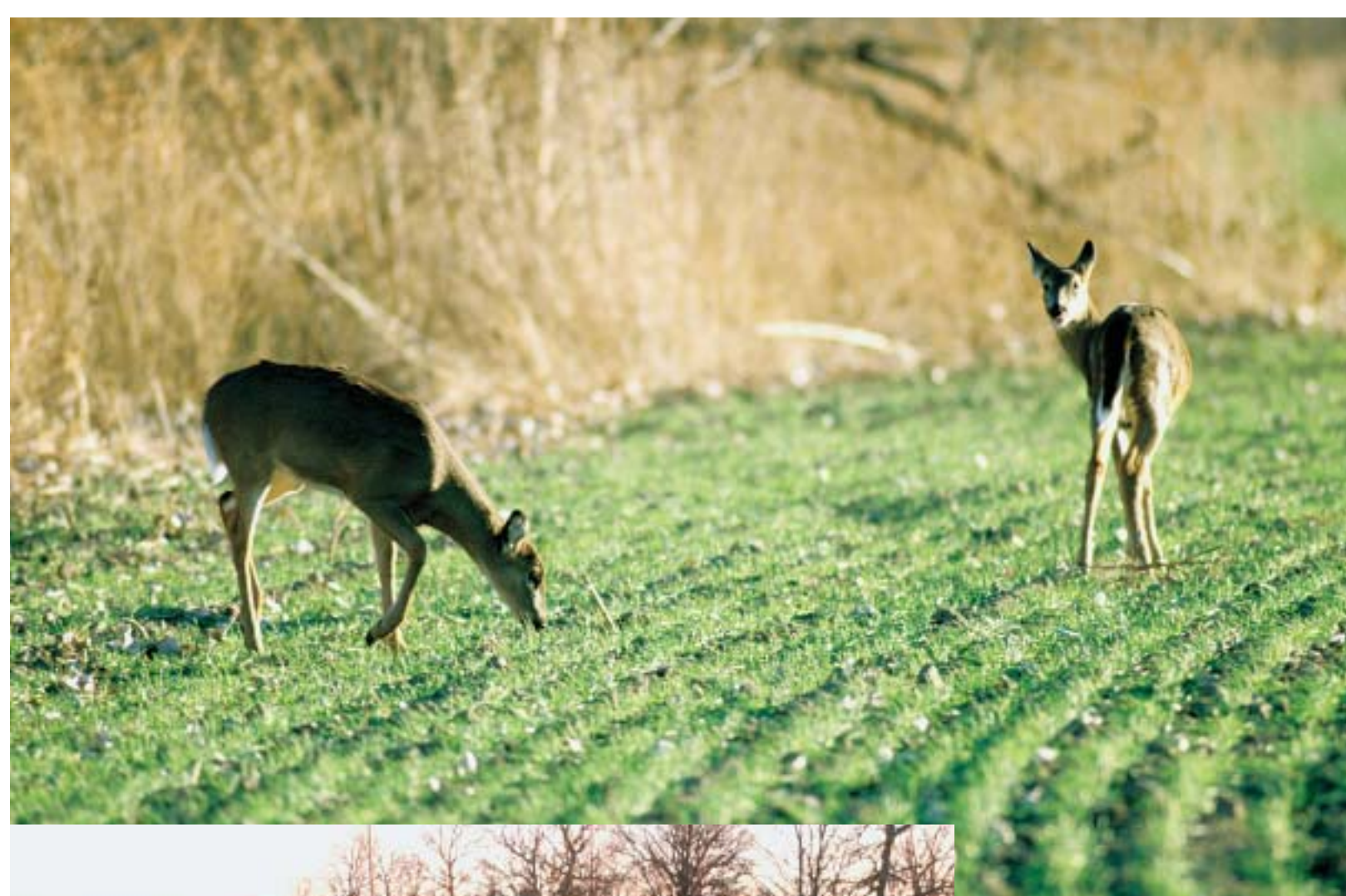
Unfortunately, the attitudes of some hunters are still stuck in the 1944 era of "save a doe so the herd can grow." Some have even adopted a "real hunters don't shoot does" philosophy. Such thinking is misplaced in modern deer management. How much better would it be if hunters changed their mantra to "real hunters do what needs to be done" and willingly took does rather than hunting only for antlered deer? If hunters aren't willing to participate to maximum effect, then regulations will have to change to ensure that adequate numbers of does are harvested each year.

The Department of Conservation establishes regulations for deer hunting, but regulations can only do so much to manage deer. The real key to effective deer management rests in the committed involvement of all Missourians, including hunters, landowners, municipal authorities and residents. Active cooperation is necessary, especially when addressing local situations.

For the most part, the Deer Management Unit system has proven very effective in managing deer numbers, but it can't always address local "hot" or "cold" spots. Creating a statewide system to deal with local situations would make regulations too complicated. Consequently, local landowners, neighbors and communities must cooperate to reach consensus regarding deer population goals, and then work together to achieve those goals.

Jim Rathert

Jim Rathert



The Department of Conservation establishes regulations for deer hunting, but regulations can only do so much to manage deer. The real key to effective deer management rests in the committed involvement of all Missourians, including hunters, landowners, municipal authorities and residents.



Rural Areas

Landowners can effectively manage deer numbers on their land simply by inviting family and friends to harvest does on their property. Several factors must be considered, including the size and shape of the acreage, the quality of

New Regulations

New regulations provide more opportunity to take antlerless deer.

- Firearms hunters may purchase and fill any number of Firearms Second Bonus Deer Hunting Permits for many units.

- Archers may purchase and fill any number of Antlerless-Only Archery Deer Hunting Permits in most units.

- The new Urban Deer Management portion of the firearms season provides two more days to take antlerless deer in the St. Louis and Kansas City areas.

- Qualifying landowners of five or more acres may Farm Tag one deer of any sex or age.

- Everyone who lives in the home with a qualifying resident landowner of 75 or more acres can receive no-cost Firearms Any-Deer and Bonus Deer Hunting Permits.

See the 2003 Fall Deer & Turkey Hunting Information booklet, available wherever permits are sold, for complete details.

the habitat, and the amount of hunting pressure. If cooperating landowners believe there are too many deer, existing regulations provide management tools in the form of liberal availability of firearms and archery hunting permits. Without adequate doe harvest statewide, deer populations will likely remain high, even if deer numbers remain low in certain localities.

A good example of landowner cooperation occurred recently in Howard and Saline counties. Last fall, a group of landowners dealt with what they judged to be too many deer by inviting youngsters to hunt on their property during the Youth-Only portion of the firearms deer season. Through the cooperative efforts of landowners, the Conservation Department, and the University of Missouri Outreach & Extension 4-H program, young Missourians had the opportunity to learn more about deer, deer hunting, and firearms safety in a carefully controlled environment. They also learned how their efforts contributed to reducing the growth potential of the area's deer herd. It was a significant beginning for what is needed in hundreds of local areas in Missouri.

Towns and Urban Areas

Small towns and municipalities must also take the initiative to address local deer issues. Only local citizens can decide what number of deer is acceptable and then take action to reach the agreed-upon goal.

In areas with high deer densities, does outnumber bucks by considerable margins (opposite page). Private landowners can encourage the harvest of does by inviting youngsters to hunt on their land during the Youth-Only portion of the firearms deer season.

Often, however, local ordinances prohibit techniques that have proven effective for managing deer. Typically, the use of firearms and archery equipment is prohibited, noisemakers and sometimes even fences are banned, and dogs usually must be penned or on a leash. Ironically, the feeding of deer, which only worsens problems, is often allowed.

Unquestionably, there are good reasons why some activities are prohibited in certain areas. However, these same activities can often be successfully employed in others. Specifically, archery hunting has proved to be safe and effective in managing deer numbers in urban and suburban areas. In one situation, nine carefully selected archers safely removed 35 deer from a single property in only four days.

Each community is unique and must establish guidelines to ensure that residents are comfortable with the selected plan of action. In the case of archery hunting, requirements can include proof of hunter education certification, proof of proficiency with archery equipment, minimum acreage requirements, written permission from landowners, mandatory check-in and check-out, hunting only from tree stands, and buffer zones around residences and roadways. Often, simply granting hunting access to property, either rural or suburban, is enough to solve or prevent a problem.

The Future

White-tailed deer are beautiful animals that provide a variety of unique and exciting recreational opportunities. However, high deer numbers can damage crops, endanger entire ecosystems and threaten human health and safety. The most effective way to manage deer numbers is to manage the number of does in the population, and hunting regula-



Cliff White

tions are one way to ensure adequate doe harvest. The booklet "Missouri Whitetails: A Management Guide for Landowners and Deer Enthusiasts" contains valuable information about managing deer. Obtain this publication by visiting online <www.conserva-tion.state.mo.us/nathis/mammals/deer/> or by writing to P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

The Conservation Department stands ready to provide technical assistance to anyone interested in managing deer populations.

Will deer hunting regulations change in the future? They must change to keep pace with the evolving deer herd and management objectives. The health and future of Missouri's deer herd depends on it. ▲



The one thing you absolutely have to know to consistently take deer.

The Real Secret To Deer Hunting Success

by John Wick illustration by Mark Raithel
photography by Jim Rathert

This is the story of a young hunter who suffered annual deer hunting failure before learning the secret. From that moment on, he enjoyed years of deer hunting success.

The story begins when I was a little boy. I wanted to hunt, but more than anything else, I wanted to hunt deer. Unfortunately, without any relatives that hunted, I never received any encouragement.

When I was 17, and living in Pennsylvania, I bought a license, borrowed a gun and joined some friends for my first hunt. We walked about half a mile into some woods and then scattered several hundred yards apart near the top of a ridge overlooking a well-used deer trail. The morning was cloudy, cold, and windy. I almost froze, but I kept watching that deer trail, waiting for my big deer to arrive.

I had heard shots all morning, but by noon, all was quiet. Suddenly two shots boomed in the valley below me and several hundred yards to my left. That perked me up, and my eyes zeroed in on that trail. Half an hour later some movement down in the valley caught my attention. It was two hunters dragging a deer.

I went down to congratulate them and see the deer. It was a nice 8-point buck. The man who shot the deer asked me where I had been sitting. When I showed him, he asked why I hadn't seen the deer, because he had watched it walk down the valley just in front of me in fairly open woods. I had been leaning against a tree watching a spot 50 yards in front of me all morning, but never looked to see what was going on farther down in the valley.

I went back to my spot and decided to work on observational skills. Then it started to rain, but I was too mule-headed to quit. An hour later the rain turned to sleet. It was looking more and more like I wasn't going to get a deer this season, but I kept waiting and watching in front of me.

After an hour of sleet it started snowing. It snowed hard for about 30 minutes, and by the time it stopped I had lost all hope of getting a deer. I decided to head back to the truck.

I turned around and walked about a hundred feet when, there in the fresh snow, I saw the tracks of several deer. I couldn't believe it! Several deer had passed not more than a hundred feet away.

Following the tracks, I walked along the top of that ridge for about a mile, but I knew I was never going to catch up with those deer. Again, I decided to return to the truck.

"Boom!" A shot sounded right in front of me. I heard someone holler, "I got him!" Next I saw a hunter step away from a tree, run a short distance and kneel down over a deer not more than two hundred yards in front of me. He was a beautiful 6-point buck.



“No matter what happens or what’s going on, or how tired you are, or how good the weather is, or how bad the weather is, keep saying to yourself, ‘In one more second, I’m going to see that deer.’”

While field dressing the deer, the happy hunter told me the deer had just ambled along the top of the ridge, stopped, and looked back at me. That was when he shot him. He said three does were with the buck when he shot.

Why hadn’t I seen those deer? I had perfect vision, but for some reason I couldn’t see four deer 200 yards away from me.

That night I returned the borrowed gun and gave up for the season. It seemed like some hunters were meant to get deer, and some weren’t. I decided I was among the latter.

When next season rolled around, I had read dozens of articles about deer hunting and was ready to give it another try. I had a nice new gun, better clothes for winter weather, a good spot all picked out and three days off. Most important, I was smarter.

Or so I thought. I didn’t get a deer that season, or for the next two seasons, for that matter.

The following summer I met a man whose deer hunting experiences were about the same as mine, but he talked of a man he knew who had gotten a deer every year for some 20 years.

With about a month to go before the season opened, I decided to visit this man and see what he had to say. He told me he always hunted alone, but if I’d help him get caught up with his work, he would take me hunting for one day. He told me not to take a gun and to stay six feet behind him the entire time we were hunting. He would show and tell me everything he knew about deer hunting.

He would tell me why some hunters get a deer every year and why some hunt all their lives and never get a deer. I eagerly agreed. This man knew the secret, and I wanted to find out what it was.

He told me to be at his place two hours before daylight, and I got there right on time. When it was light enough to shoot, we headed into some brushy woods. He said it was unwise to walk in before daylight because you would just chase out all the deer ahead of you, but if you waited until daylight, you’d often get your deer before you got to your spot. Sure enough, we saw three small groups of does before we got to the spot he had picked to stand.

He told me to sit down and that he was going to stand. I sat a long time, but I can’t say I learned anything. The expert was alert and watched everything around him, but I could hardly stay awake.

Suddenly his shot woke me from my daydream. He turned and said, “Let’s go see what he looks like.” I followed him about a 150 yards to see a buck with one side of his rack broken off. The other side had five long points.

After field dressing the deer, the expert drove me to a nearby diner. Over our meal, he told me he had been watching me before he shot the buck. “If you had been alone,” he said, “you never would have seen the deer, let alone shot it.” He said I only needed to know one thing if I was ever going to get a deer.

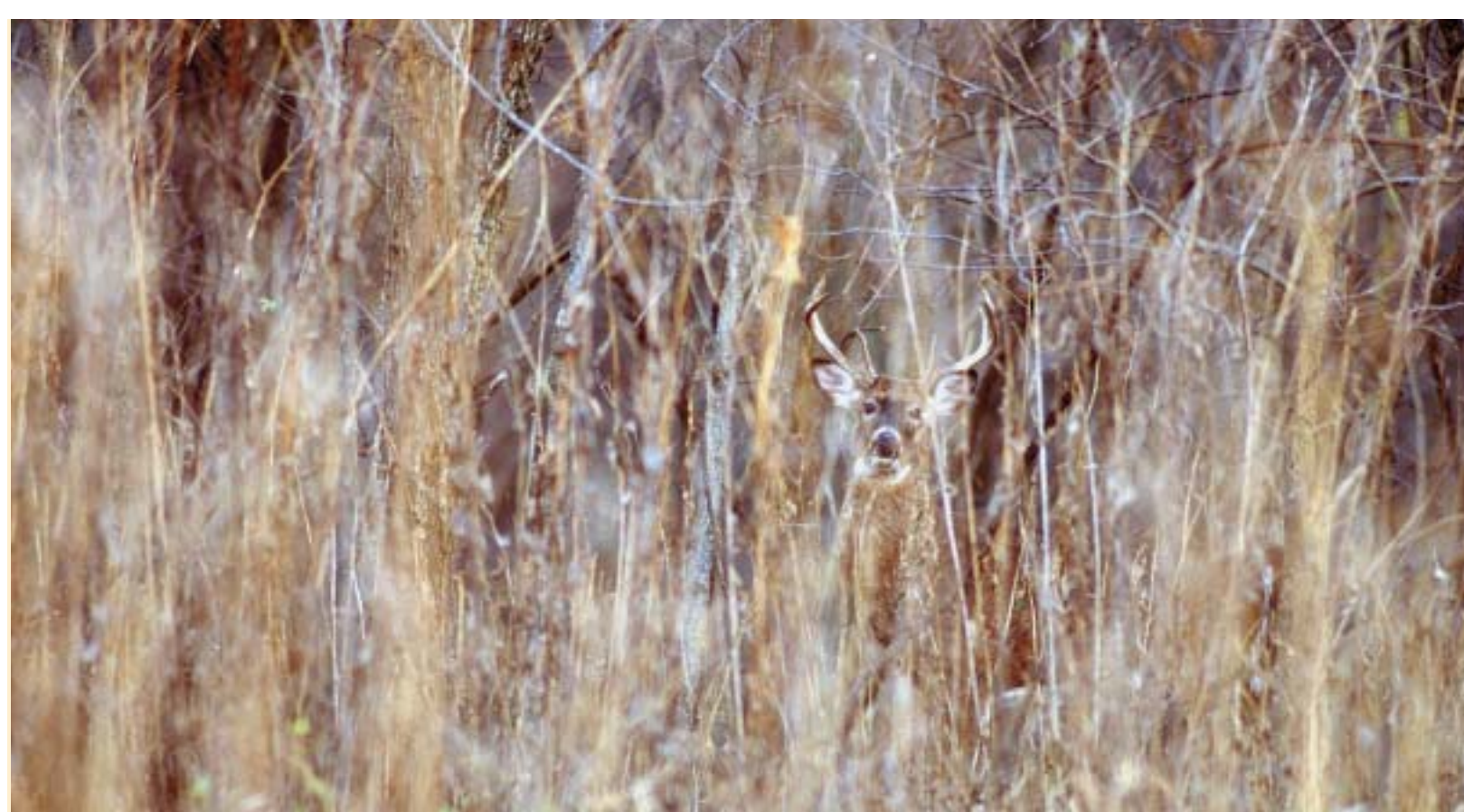
This is what he said: “From the time you load your gun until the time you unload it, keep thinking to yourself that in one more second you’re going to see that buck. No matter what happens or what’s going on, or how tired you are, or how good the weather is, or how bad the weather is, keep saying to yourself, ‘In one more second, I’m going to see that deer.’ That’s the secret.”

We returned back to the same general area where we had spent the morning. The expert got out of his truck, loaded his gun and entered another brushy area. He crept through this tangled mess, alert and quite obviously believing that he was going to see a deer. About every hundred feet, he stopped, stood and slowly turned completely around, looking at everything.

After about an hour, he looked at me and pointed into the brush to our left. I didn’t see anything, but he kept pointing, and finally I noticed it. A doe was lying right at the edge of a small patch of brush and honeysuckle.

We continued, but two hours later I was tired and bored. It was going to be dark soon, and I was thinking about





where to hunt tomorrow. Suddenly the expert aimed his rifle at something I couldn't see. He fired, and two does burst from the brush 200 feet away.

I hadn't seen them before they moved, but the expert told me he saw the does and a buck lying down watching us, evidently confident that we hadn't seen them. He led me to a beautiful 11-point buck lying dead from a clean shot in the neck. The expert admired his deer, and we dragged him out. We went back to his house and talked until midnight.

The expert gave me dozens more tips, most of which I had read in books and articles. Undoubtedly, the most important thing he told me was to believe that I was going to see deer.

I realized the importance of this secret after he shot that 11-point buck. Not one deer hunter in a hundred would have seen that deer, but the expert did. He was so sure there were deer around, and so sure he would see one, and so sure in one more second he would get his chance, that instead of just seeing a lot of woods, he was seeing every detail in the woods.

At last I realized my problem. I was so sure that I wasn't going to see anything, that I really didn't see anything.

The next morning it was foggy and raining as I left my truck, but my spirits were bright. I was armed with a powerful new weapon: the power of a positive attitude. I kept thinking - and believing - "In one more second, I'm going to see a buck. In one more second, I'm going to see a deer. In one more second, I'm going to see that beautiful buck. In one more second, my chance will come."

It was wet, cold, and uncomfortable. I had been out for hours, but I knew in one more second my chance would come. I was happy, alert and ready. Suddenly I saw a deer leg! That's right, a deer leg. There was a thick pine tree about 75 yards in front of me, but between the bottom branch and the ground I saw one deer leg from just above the knee to the hoof. I couldn't believe I had seen one little deer leg in that whole big forest.

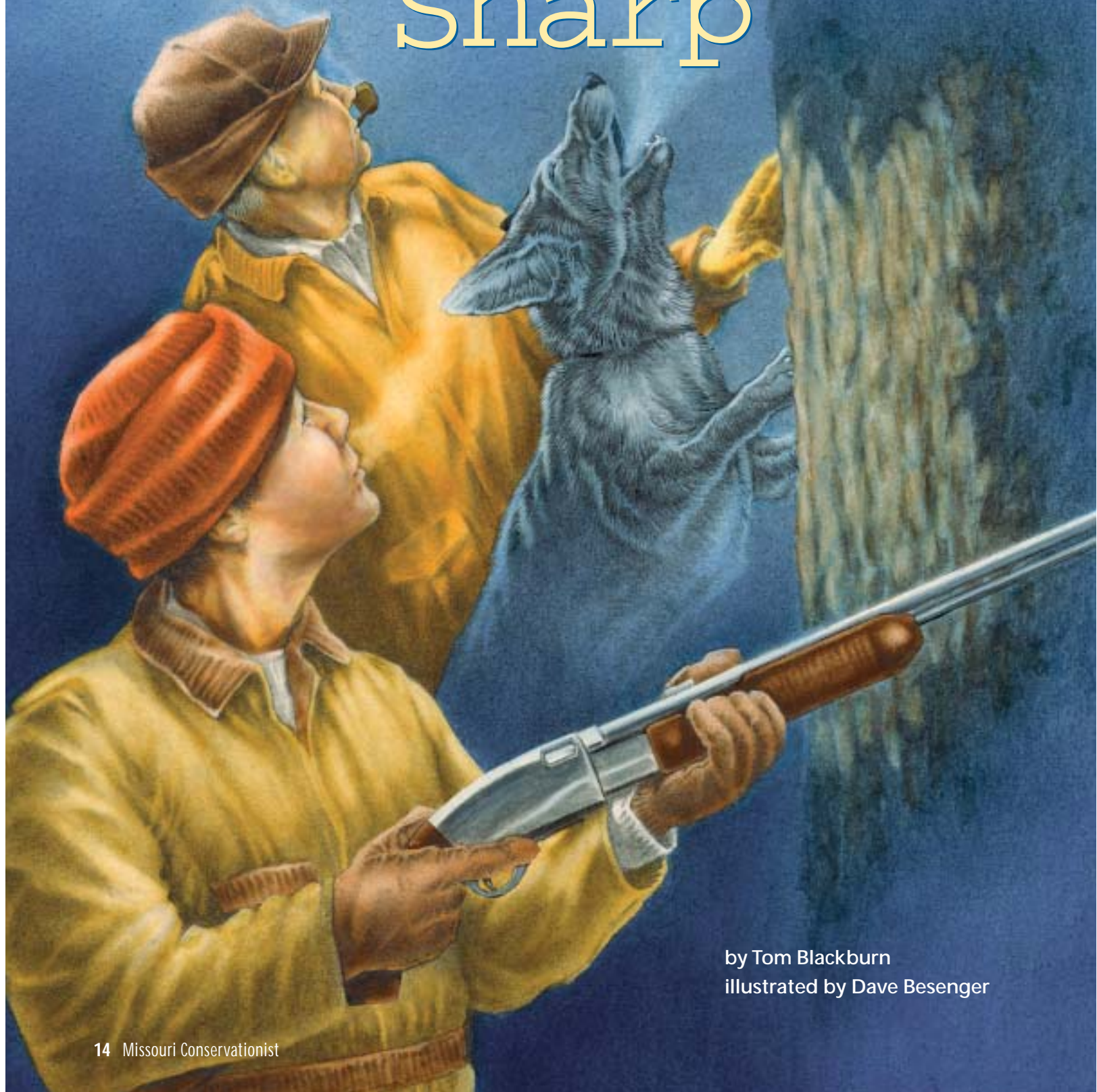
The deer took several steps away from the tree. It was a buck! I aimed for the shoulder, squeezed the trigger, and down he went. An 8-point! Words can't express how good I felt at that moment.

I am happy to say I have experienced that same thrill more than 40 times. Every year since then I have gotten my buck, but I have also learned that I don't have to kill a deer to have a successful hunt. Once I cleared the hurdle of killing my first buck, I learned that a positive attitude enables me to enjoy the natural setting, the friendship of my hunting partners, and the adventure of the hunt. I have a good time rain or shine, buck or no buck. Now they call me an expert, but I'm really not. It's just that I know the secret, and now you know it, too. ▲



Grandpa, Coons and Sharp

The night was



by Tom Blackburn

illustrated by Dave Besenger

crisp and cold at Granny and Grandpa's farm near Steelville.

The year was 1973, and I was visiting for Christmas vacation. Earlier that day, I had been after Grandpa to go coon hunting in the evening. He thought it over for about half a second before agreeing it would be a good idea. So, after one of Granny's superb, rib sticking dinners (including milk from Fullbucket, even though she was nearly dry that time of year, string beans from the garden, roast beef and gravy), Grandpa and I readied ourselves for the cold night hunt. I bundled up with an old pair of Grandpa's long underwear, jeans, T-shirt, long sleeve flannel shirt, and then my lined coveralls, with warm gloves and hat. Of course, I also covered my feet with thick socks stuffed into waterproof leather boots. I was particularly proud to bring along my new Remington .22 pump rifle that Dad gave me for my birthday the previous August.

Both Grandpa and I loved to hunt, and we couldn't have asked for a more perfect coon hunting night. When we stepped outside on the concrete front steps, the dew had begun turning to frost on the grass, so it provided good scent for Grandpa's coonhound, Sharp. Sharp was fresh, full of dinner and excited for the hunt. There was virtually no wind, the moon was almost full, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky. We could see about half as well as we could in the daytime. The two huge sycamores by the house cast long shadows on the ground.

Our breath froze in the frigid night air. I had forgotten my stainless steel, waterproof match holder, so I rushed back into the old farm house to get it. On my way back out, Granny caught me for one last tight hug and smile, and wished us good luck. Of course, her hands were soft, and she smelled like the evening meal.

Grandpa was already down the cinder block steps and almost to the garage. Sharp sat patiently beside him, slowly swishing his tail, knowing what was to come. I started to rush down the stairs, but a word of caution by Grandpa, and my growing level of maturity (including my parent's trust in me to carry a gun), slowed me down and re-focused my attention on the loaded gun cradled in my arms. As I took the 10 steps over the gravel swale between the steps and garage, I noticed that the rocks were frozen together.

Grandpa looked at me with his characteristic half smile, his pipe clenched between his false teeth. A well worn, lined hunting cap covered his bald head. He was five feet, eight inches tall, strong and lean as a rail from a lifetime of hard work. Rare was the day that he wasn't working on something on his 140-acre homestead farm. He had turned 69 the previous September, but he was still fit as a fiddle.

As always, Grandpa led the way, followed by Sharp, then me, as we walked along the road past the old garden spot.

The pole bean vines stood like white shrouded ghosts against the fence. Grandpa puffed on his ever present pipe, and I got an enjoyable whiff every once in a while of the new tobacco blend I had bought him for Christmas.

Grandpa opened the steel gate and let me and Sharp out. As always, Sharp stayed back and waited for Grandpa to look him in the eye and give him permission to come.

Sharp was born on the adjacent Harman farm in 1969. The Harman boys didn't want to see him die, so they abandoned him in Grandpa's barn. Grandpa recognized something special about the little dog, so he kept him and later named him Sharp. With Grandpa's training, Sharp turned into the best hunting dog, livestock dog and friend a man or boy could ever hope for. He was part German shepherd and part mutt, and he must have collected all the good traits from both family lines. He was handsome black, with brown eyebrows and paws. He stood as tall as any German shepherd and he was unusually powerful, smart and quick. No dog or other beast could best him in a fight.

When we got within 200 feet of the trees, Sharp and I kept looking at Grandpa for the sign. About 100 feet from the trees, Grandpa hissed, "Sharp!" and the hunt was on. His hiss was a light, short whistle sometimes followed by, "Get em boy." Sharp flew across the frosty grass and was out of sight in five seconds. His black coat blended perfectly with the night, and if it hadn't been a full moon, we couldn't have seen him after he'd left our side.

Grandpa and I walked quietly for about five minutes as we entered the woods. We didn't hurry because Sharp let us set the pace of the hunt, unless he found a scent or heard coons talking. He would check the woods in front of us and circle back occasionally to check our location and direction. After about 10 minutes in the woods, we came upon a small watering pond. I walked down to the pond to check for animal signs or anything else of interest. Grandpa refilled his pipe. The sides of the pond had begun to freeze, and the dirt was too crusty to reveal fresh animal prints. I walked around the pond but didn't turn up anything worthy of note.

I was startled back to the hunt by Sharp's clear, strong bark. We walked slowly in his direction. I wanted to hurry, but Grandpa advised a slow approach because Sharp wasn't too far away, and it gave him a chance to verify the tree. Given time, Sharp would abandon a treed coon or squirrel if the tree had a hollow spot in it. He knew all the trees around.

We kept up our slow pace until we saw Sharp circling and looking up into a medium size red oak. As usual, old polite Sharp had stopped barking, which allowed us to look carefully without unnecessary commotion and the potential to scare our game. After about one minute of looking,

Grandpa said in a hushed voice, "There he is, Tommy." He pointed to a spot where three of the larger limbs came together at the trunk. The moon and sky were so bright that I didn't need Grandpa's flashlight to see the coon.

"Let's see if that new gun is as good as you say," said Grandpa. I aimed, but the coon had flattened against a limb, and I couldn't get a head shot. So I circled the tree until I could finally see the back of his head. I aimed carefully and squeezed the trigger. In the night air, the .22 just made a light crack. Nothing happened.

"Hold on ... give him a chance to fall," said Grandpa. "He's angled in a resting position."

About a minute later, we saw movement. Then, the coon released his grip on the limb and dropped to the ground. Of course, old Sharp had been quietly watching the whole time.

The sow coon was dead when she hit the ground, so Sharp didn't even need to wrestle her. He brought her to Grandpa and laid her on the ground at his feet. Grandpa rewarded Sharp with a kind word and scratch between the ears, and then I did the same. After praising Sharp, I picked up the coon and said, "Wow, you might need to carry her, Grandpa." He took her from me and said it was one of the biggest he'd seen around. At that point, I couldn't have asked for more, but Grandpa and Sharp wanted to continue, and so did I, for that matter.

Sharp was more eager than ever and acted like he knew right where we should go next. He waited for Grandpa to hiss him off again, and then he took off like a shot. We walked toward the creek, keeping a wide distance from Blanton's house so we wouldn't wake their dogs. We crossed the creek at the road to keep from risking a fall in the shallow, icy water. We talked in low voices about anything that came to mind. I asked Grandpa stuff like, "How many coons do you figure you've killed in your life?" and, "What do coons do all day to keep out of sight?" and, "Tell me about your best coon hunt."

Grandpa's dripping nose and my numbing fingertips told me the night was getting colder. We had planned to turn north on the creek (Grandpa and Granny called it the branch) and head upstream to Miller's property. We hadn't gone but a few steps when Sharp's voice called us again. This time, he was far across Blanton's field and up the hill to the east. Grandpa and I stepped a little quicker this time because Sharp was so far away. We crossed the field and climbed over Blanton's gate. Grandpa grumbled about being so close to the Blanton house and barn and that we might wake their dogs. Sure enough, Blanton's dogs started howling at us and Sharp,

and there was nothing we could do about it. Grandpa muttered something I couldn't quite understand.

We didn't have to go far up the hill to find Sharp. He was circling the largest post oak in sight. The tree was so big and had such a good canopy that we couldn't find anything for a while. In fun, Grandpa said to Sharp, "It better not be a possum."

After about five minutes of circling and looking, I started to wonder if the tree had a hole unknown to Sharp. Pretty soon, I asked Grandpa for his advice on that possibility.

"Don't bet on that," he said. "Just keep looking."

Soon, I took the light from Grandpa and made my own inspection. In a quiet voice, I called for Grandpa to come quickly. I shined the light on a fork of this huge tree. Both sides of the fork were about 40 feet above the ground and

could rightfully have made their own tree in the fork. There we saw two shiny points that looked like eyes.

We conferred over what to do. Finally, Grandpa said, "We're far enough from everything that if you don't hit it or it turns out to be nothing, there will be no harm done. And, this might be our best and only shot."

Grandpa put down the other coon and bent down behind me to shine the light over my shoulder and through the sights. His tobacco smell and general Grandpa scent added to my confidence. It was a long shot, but our spirits were high and we thought things lined up pretty well. I squeezed the trigger like my Dad had taught me, and again the Remington responded with a light "crack." The two shiny points immediately disappeared, and within five seconds, we heard a great thud on the ground.

Sharp didn't need any instructions on what to do. He went to it immediately and with a good deal of effort, dragged the huge boar coon to Grandpa. Again, we rewarded Sharp with words and rubs. He wiggled and squirmed in delight at having pleased us so.

"Lookie there Tommy," said Grandpa with a great wrinkled smile. "You won't ever see one bigger than this." He said it weighed 30 pounds or more. Upon closer examination, he said, "Well I'll be darned" (or something like that), "that is one straight shooting gun. You hit him right between the eyes." I don't believe I ever saw Grandpa happier than at that moment.

All three of us basked in the thrill of the hunt, bursting with pride. On the way home, we talked nonstop about the tree, the shot, the size of the coons, and everything else that happened that night. It didn't matter what we carried or how heavy it was. We were so happy: Grandpa, Grandson and dog on a cold, unforgettable night. ▲





Missourians have close ties to the land. They are proud of our natural resources and have worked diligently to control soil erosion, improve water quality and manage our forests. They also have a special tie to wildlife. Countless Missourians are finding ways to make their land more valuable for wildlife.

The Farm Bill and

Missouri Landowners

The new Farm Bill makes it easy—and sometimes profitable—to improve wildlife habitat on your property.

by Brad McCord

A variety of technical and financial assistance programs have helped landowners improve their property. The Farm Security and Reinvestment Act is the latest in a series of government programs designed to assist landowners. Passed by the Congress in May 2002 and administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), this legislation is commonly known as the Farm Bill.

Many people consider USDA programs to be targeted solely to agricultural production efforts. Although the Farm Bill primarily addresses agricultural production, it also deals with a wide range of landowner objectives and a diversity of land uses.

For example, the Farm Bill provides federal dollars for technical and financial assistance to people participating in various conservation programs and installing beneficial conservation practices on their property.

The Missouri Department of Conservation provides staff to assist landowners and USDA staff with specialized fish, forest, and wildlife planning. The combination of Conservation Department staff members and the substantial funding and assistance provided by the Farm Bill can make a big difference to Missouri's soil, water and wildlife resources.

Steve Peoples of Shelby County is one landowner who has been able to take advantage of one of the Farm Bill's popular programs, which combines USDA funding with technical assistance provided by the Conservation Department.

Peoples farms row crops on about 1,200 acres. He switched to no-till farming in 1988 to reduce both costs and soil erosion. His property includes 210 acres along Black Creek that he believed would benefit from special management. He farmed the dark bot-

tomland soil from 1994-2000, but because of frequent flooding along the creek, he was able to plant and harvest only three years of crops.

Peoples studied the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) with cautious interest until 1999, when John Baker of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the USDA agency responsible for administering WRP, and Shawn Duckworth of the Conservation Department helped him formulate a plan.

"Staff from NRCS and the Conservation Department came out to the farm and answered all of our questions," Peoples said. "It helped me decide WRP was right for us, and a contract was finalized in 2000."

Along with the wetland restoration, the project included planting 37 acres of trees, as well as nearly 26 acres of native warm-season grasses surrounding the wetland. The tract also includes a healthy riparian corridor along the creek that contains a variety of bottomland tree species. Steve and his son, Anthony, are particularly proud of a huge sycamore tree along the creek. It takes five or six adults joining hands to reach around it.

The Peoples family especially enjoys watching wetland wildlife. In the two hours I spent on the farm with Steve, we observed turkeys, deer, bobwhite quail, great blue herons, several species of ducks, a yellow crowned-night heron and countless other birds too agile to identify. Steve also likes knowing the permanent easement he has arranged will protect the land after he and his family are no longer able to care for it. In fact, Steve thinks the permanent easement may improve the value of the land over time.

"Having lived on the property 46 years of my life, I feel like the benefits of WRP are unending," he said.

Currently, Missouri has about 641 WRP easements covering nearly 93,000 acres. Most of them are permanent,

and some are 30-year easements. The Wetland Reserve Program also offers a 10-year option for landowners who want to restore wetlands but don't want to place land in a long-term easement.

Another popular program with landowners across the nation is the Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP. Administered by the Farm Services Agency (FSA), it started in 1985 and was designed to pay landowners for up to 10 years to remove sensitive lands from crop production and establish either grasses or trees. When managed correctly, lands enrolled in CRP significantly reduce soil erosion, improve water quality of streams and wetlands, and provide habitat for several species of wildlife.

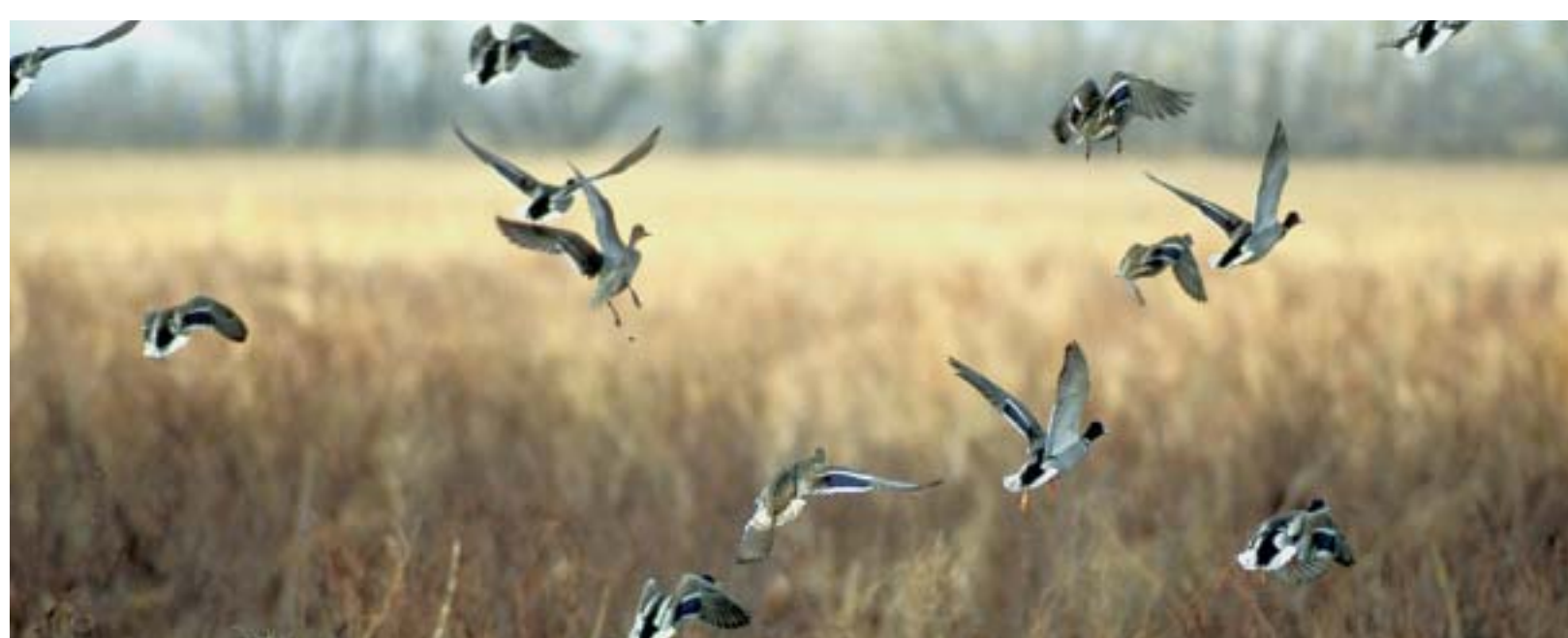
Like all USDA programs, CRP is totally voluntary. More than 1.5 million acres of land in Missouri are enrolled in the CRP program.

John Grice, a retired Linn County farmer and landowner, has been active in CRP since 1985. He owns 996 acres in the Locust Creek watershed, and he has enrolled 378 of those acres in CRP. Locust Creek has long been a source of concern because of the potential for too much sediment or too many nutrients entering the stream. Grice says CRP has helped many landowners in the watershed reduce the amount of soil runoff into streams.



Cliff White

Jim Rathert



Jim Rathert

Grice is passionate about bobwhite quail and likes to work bird dogs. The 2002 season, he said, was the first hunting season since he was 12 years old in which he didn't shoot a quail on his farm. He said his property held quail, but the coveys were so small he didn't want to reduce their numbers.

Grice has been actively managing his CRP grasslands for bobwhite quail, and he is starting to see a difference. The cropland portions of the tracts were originally seeded with a mixture of smooth brome grass and annual les-

pedeza, but Grice now recognizes the benefits of native warm-season grasses, like little bluestem and switchgrass, for quail and grassland birds.

The woody draws and waterways, which are not eligible for CRP, originally contained head-high shrubs and saplings, including gray dogwood, American plum and aromatic sumac. These provided excellent loafing areas for quail and much needed bare ground under the dense canopy of the shrubs.

Over the years, Grice noticed those shrubby draws become dominated by

Steve Peoples and his son stand near wetlands restored through the Wetland Reserve Program. The restoration will provide habitat for multiple fish and wildlife species, increase flood storage capacity and contribute to water quality.

full-size trees. These trees gradually shaded out the understory plants that might have provided habitat for rabbits and quail. In addition, the grasslands under the CRP contract became dense and thick with litter from several years without management.

Without intensive management, CRP fields originally seeded to brome grass revert to fescue and invasive trees like honey locust. However, thanks to prescribed burning and the help of a small tractor and disk, Grice is beginning to see his CRP fields hold more quail.

One convenient and inexpensive technique that Grice likes is to disk strips throughout the grass fields. The strips temporarily set back the grass and allow a combination of forbs and ragweed and other beneficial weeds to sprout. The strips also create much needed bare ground within the field. Grice also uses the strips as fire breaks

for his prescribed burn program. He burns each field every third year.

It's important to note that landowners with CRP contracts must get approval from the local USDA office before any manipulation, such as burning or disking, of their CRP acres.

Grice enrolled in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to control some of the invasive woody species and return the woody draws to more beneficial quail habitat. He's removing honey locust trees, and he's treating the stumps to prevent re-sprouting. The WHIP contract is a five year plan that provides cost share for the habitat practices Grice has implemented.

"These programs not only benefit me financially, but the wildlife gives me pleasure," Grice said. "It's a good deal."

One Madison County family uses the benefits of the new Farm Bill to better manage the forested land on their property. Harry

Robbins and his sons, Arthur and James, have 975 acres of forest land and pasture in the Castor River watershed north of Marquand. They actively enhance their property for wildlife, while providing pasture and grassland for a livestock haying operation on their farm.

Robbins is a 15-year board member of the Madison County Soil and Water Conservation District. He is also an accountant. He is familiar with many of the state and federal programs used by landowners, and he recognizes their value.

Joe Tousignant, a Wildlife Services Biologist with the Conservation Department in Jackson, has worked closely with the Robbins family, providing recommendations for habitat improvement and explaining program guidelines. He helped the family enroll its property in WHIP in 2000. The primary focus of the WHIP contract is improving habitat conditions for deer and turkeys.

Tousignant recommended creating two forest openings and developing two wildlife watering facilities within the forested portion of the property. Each of the forest openings was seeded to a wildlife-friendly mixture of grasses and clover to provide green browse for deer, as well as important brood rearing cover for turkeys and small game.

Robbins removed smaller and less viable trees from the acreage adjacent



Cliff White

With prescribed burning and intensive management, John Grice has been able to improve habitat for bobwhite quail and many grassland species on his CRP lands in northwest Missouri.



Cliff White



Proper forest and livestock management has helped the Robbins family increase wildlife numbers on their farm while addressing critical soil erosion and water quality concerns.



Jim Rathert

to the forest openings to increase the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor. This practice, called timber stand improvement, reduces the threat of red oak decline, a condition facing many older oak stands in Missouri.

Timber stand improvement boosts the value of the remaining trees, increases acorn production and improves the habitat for deer, turkey, squirrel and rabbit and other wildlife. The Robbins family also excludes livestock from forested areas of the farm. This helps reduce soil erosion and increases the amount of green browse and herbaceous cover for many wildlife species.

The Robbins family employs a rotational grazing system using low maintenance, high-tensile, electric, cross fencing. To provide a more

dependable water source for livestock, Robbins installed a unique spring system that captures underground water that would otherwise have seeped to the surface. This watering system also has improved water quality, reduced erosion and created more usable hay ground.

To further diversify their grazing operation and provide additional benefits to quail and grassland bird species, Robbins has applied for cost share assistance through the Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP) to convert a portion of his fescue pasture to native warm-season grasses.

Steve Peoples, John Grice and Harry Robbins are just a few of the many Missouri landowners who benefit from the provisions of the Farm Bill.

Because 93 percent of Missouri land is privately owned, the future of many wildlife species remains in the hands of landowners like them. The Department of Conservation is committed to helping all Missouri landowners find ways to derive maximum benefit from their land while enhancing the conservation of Missouri's fish, forest and wildlife resources.

For more information about the kinds of help available, contact your Department of Conservation private land conservationist or local USDA office. They will help you determine how best to achieve your objectives for improving the soil, water and wildlife resources on your land. ▲



Trouble ensues when blackbirds, cowbirds, starlings and grackles flock together.

Birds of a Feather

by Joan Banks
photography by Jim Rathert

A lone red-winged blackbird sings from the top branch of a bald cypress tree standing sentinel over my pond. He proclaims his territory with a proud trill that signals he is the top bird around these parts. His mate, looking like an overgrown sparrow, is harder to spot.

He is a welcome resident of springtime when he is being territorial, but when nesting season is over, he, his mate and their offspring will join other birds to roost. There is safety in numbers. It's harder for a hawk to pick off a single bird when it's surrounded by thousands to hundreds of thousands of its kin.

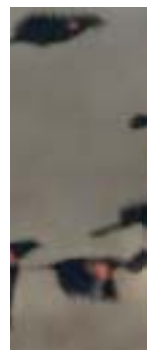
Flocks are composed primarily of "birds of a feather," that is, birds from the family Icteridae, especially blackbirds, grackles, and cowbirds. Bobolinks, meadowlarks and orioles are also in this family, but they don't associate with the others. European starlings often join the flock. These are from the family Sturnidae.

The sheer numbers in the flock will make them less than welcome wherever they go. These summer and autumn roosts are primarily in deciduous trees, and when the leaves fall, many of the birds will fly south. Many others remain in Missouri, and others pour in from the north to form huge winter roosts in conifers and buildings. During the day they may fly as far as 20 miles to feed.

From a distance, a flock of blackbirds and starlings leaving or returning to their roost resembles a river of smoke as it undulates with unseen currents. On and on it comes, mile after mile. It's the closest I'll ever come to experiencing the great passenger pigeon flocks that once darkened the skies. The sight is awesome, but it's troublesome, too, especially to the people whose property harbors or abuts a roost. The biggest critics of blackbirds are often farmers.

Larry Riley farms rice, corn and other crops in southeastern Missouri and is also chairman of the Missouri Rice Research and Merchandising Council.

The head and neck of a grackle (inset) are iridescent in the sunlight, and the bird's yellow eyes give it a perennially startled look. Red-winged blackbirds (left) are one of the most abundant species in North America.



"A dozen birds aren't bad," Riley said, "but when you get 20,000 or more to a field, they can thin a stand of rice to the point you don't have a field of rice. They get in the corn, too. When that little spike comes through the ground, they pull it up and eat the kernel."

They attack mature corn as well, tearing open the husks and feeding on the kernels.

Depredation of crops is not the only hazard farmers face from the birds. The quantity of manure produced by thousands of birds is significant.

"The droppings go through the combine, through the grain bins and to the mill," Riley said. "The mill turns down your crop. One farmer had 30,000 bushels turned down."

A contaminated crop can be run through a seed cleaner, but that eats into already slim profits.

Riley said farmers try everything to startle the birds and move them out of the area, from using propane cannons to driving around the field shooting bottle rockets or shotguns. He recognizes that scaring the birds away isn't a solution because it just moves the problem to the neighbor's place, but "that's all you can do," he said.

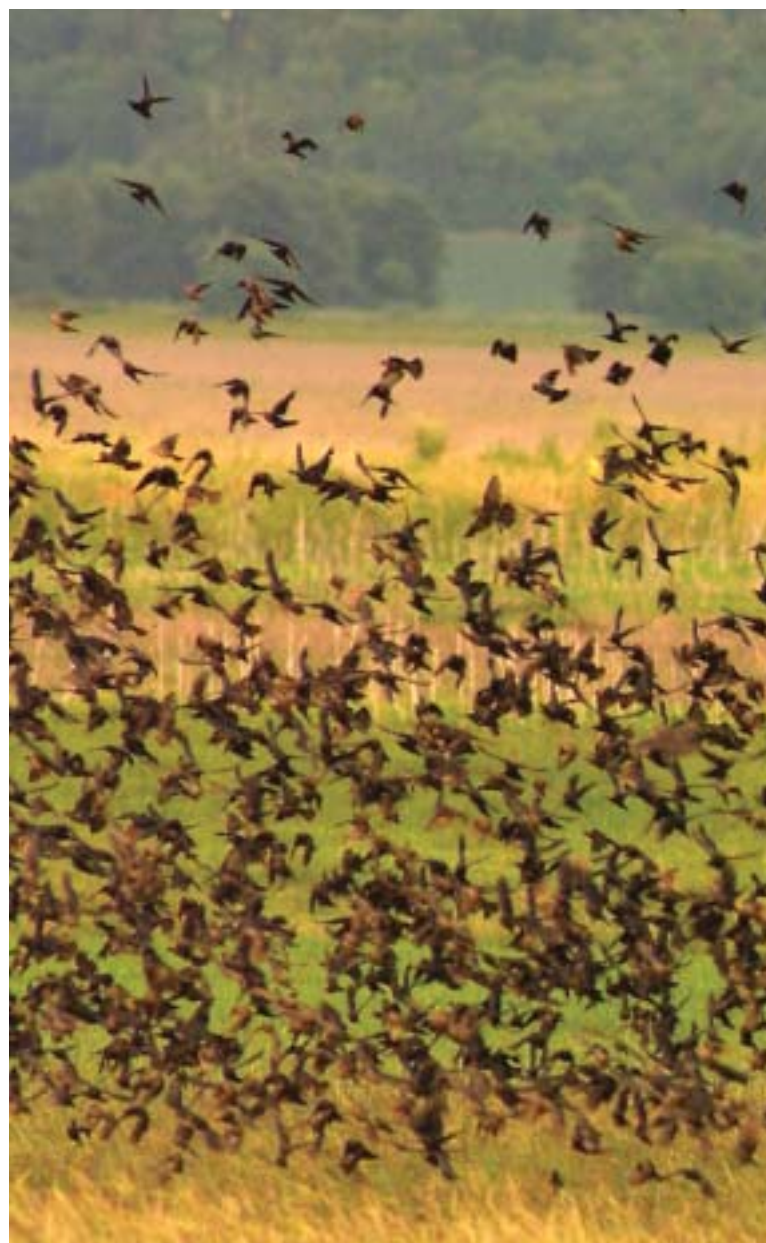
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Wildlife Services is the government agency charged with resolving bird issues.

"When we are called with bird problems, we talk to the individual to find out exactly what the problem is and what species is causing the problem," said Ed Hartin, Missouri State Director for APHIS. "We then give recommendations on how they can legally respond to the conflict they are facing. We let them know all of the options, starting with non-lethal all the way up to lethal removal."

Controls include frightening devices, altering habitat, cultural controls (for example, planting corn with tight husks), trapping, seed treatment repellents, and poisoning. APHIS continually searches for more effective control methods.

Most damage control done by APHIS is non-lethal, according to an article by Ted Williams, in the November 2001 issue of *Audubon*. An APHIS plan in the Dakotas to poison millions of red-winged blackbirds that were feasting on the sunflower crop drew pressure because of the danger to non-target birds. Also because they migrate, the birds poisoned would probably not be the same birds that would damage the crops later in the season.

Hartin said that blackbirds hit Missouri rice farmers hardest. In 1999, our farmers lost an estimated \$4.8 million out of a total yield of about \$55.69 million to blackbird depredation. Corn farmers lost \$1.5 million out of \$482.3 million. Wheat and milo crops also sustain losses each year, as do livestock and poultry operations in lost feed.



Farmers aren't the only ones troubled by blackbird and starling flocks. City and suburban dwellers find them a nuisance and attack the problem in a variety of ways.

"My first memory is a bunch of the neighbors going out with pan lids and banging them together," an elderly woman told me.

Thinning vegetation where the birds roost is one non-lethal way of controlling them in urban and suburban areas. That, along with scare tactics, are the most common ways to deal with them, said Dan Pekarek, City of Joplin Community Health Director. Health officials like Pekarek get involved because of the potential hazard posed by histoplasmosis, a disease caused by a fungus that thrives in bird droppings. Humans can develop the disease from inhaling the fungal spores.

When blackbirds and starlings roosted in pine trees on the Sikeston Country Club Golf Course, course superintendent Jon Etter said that in some places the manure "was an inch thick, even after the rains."



European starling



brown-headed cowbird



red-winged blackbird



great-tailed grackle

Flocks of blackbirds can wreak havoc on cropfields, not only eating grain, but fouling what they leave behind. The birds also victimize lawns, parks and golf courses.

Problem birds?

If you have a problem with blackbirds and starlings, call your local health department or your area Missouri Department of Conservation office. The Conservation Department has several articles about blackbirds and blackbird control on its Web site at www.conservation.state.mo.us. Search word: blackbirds. University of Missouri County Extension offices have information both online or by mail.



It stank, too. That doesn't contribute to a nice day on the links.

"We got pyrotechnics and propane tanks and went out for five nights for a week and stuck to it and they moved on," Etter said. Even when the birds have been scared away, if the soil tests positive for the fungus, it must be decontaminated before it's safe.

Red-winged blackbirds, which dominate some roosts, are probably the most abundant species in North America. You'll see them in marshes, wetlands and roadside ditches. Their legs are adapted to do "splits" like a gymnast as they cling to two separate cattails or reeds.

The population was estimated at about 190 million in 1984, but their numbers are declining, said Brad Jacobs, a wildlife ecologist and ornithologist for the Missouri Department of Conservation. Jacobs is the author of *Birds in Missouri*.

"Red-wings have been declining at about 2.1 percent a year for the last twenty years in Missouri—nationwide at about 0.8 percent," Jacobs said, "but they're so super abundant, no one notices."

Another problem bird is the European starling, which is particularly abundant in huge urban roosts.

Often in a blackbird flock you'll see grackles, most commonly common grackles. In the Osage Plains area or the western border of the state, you might spot great-tailed grackles, first seen in Missouri in 1976. Recent sightings suggest they are expanding eastward.

Cowbirds join the huge flocks, too. This species could probably be crowned Most Unpopular Bird because it's a sponger, or more technically, a brood parasite. A cowbird doesn't build its own nest. Instead it lays its eggs in the nests of other species. The unsuspecting nest builder then becomes a foster parent. Young cowbirds are big and aggressive and likely to get most of the food, causing the other babies to starve or get pushed out of the nest.

Jeff Cantrell, a conservation education consultant with MDC and a birder, observed that cowbirds are causing a serious population decline in some of the warblers, vireos, and indigo buntings in the fragmented forest regions of Missouri.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 seems to protect all of these problem birds, except starlings (which aren't natives), unless a person has a valid permit to destroy them. Marlys Bulander, the Region 3 permit administrator for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, says a federal regulation specifically says a permit is not needed to control blackbirds, grackles, crows and magpies "when found committing depredation or about to commit depredations, or when concentrated in such numbers and manner as to constitute



A propane cannon helps discourage birds from remaining at roosting and feeding sites. The propane-powered device doesn't shoot anything. It simply makes a loud noise at pre-set intervals to frighten the birds into flight.

a health hazard or other nuisance" (50 CFR 21.43). The federal regulation, however, is subordinate to state regulations.

Missouri's *Wildlife Code* says that no bird may be killed, except as specifically permitted elsewhere in the rules (3 CSR 10-4.110). Elsewhere, the *Wildlife Code* allows a landowner, or his or her agent, to deal with nuisance birds (3 CSR 10-4.130) when they are, beyond a reasonable doubt, damaging his or her property. In that event, you must notify an agent of the Conservation Department within 24 hours of taking action.

Starlings are not protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or Missouri's *Wildlife Code* because they are not native birds. According to *Birds in Missouri*, European starlings were brought to America by the American Acclimatization Society in 1890. Its mission was to have all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's works introduced to North America, and a starling is mentioned in *Henry IV*.

Despite rules that appear to favor landowners, farmers like Larry Riley must be wary of killing any of these birds because of the danger of inadvertently killing protected species. The Fish and Wildlife Service once documented 68 species of birds found near North and South Dakota sunflower fields in the spring. Rice fields, corn fields, feedlots are probably similar. It would be difficult to avoid killing untargeted species.

Joplin's Dan Pekarek told how blackbirds and starlings used to roost in an area on the south edge of Joplin. "Now there are houses there," he said, "and there's a conflict between the birds and the residents."

People are frustrated by bird problems, but they are bound to increase as more woodland is cleared and cultivated and rural areas continue to be urbanized. Simply put, there are more of us to be bothered every year, and fewer places for the birds to roost without causing problems. ▲

NEWS & ALMANAC

BY JIM LOW

Lowell Mohler appointed to Conservation Commission

Gov. Bob Holden recently appointed Lowell Mohler of Jefferson City to a six-year term on the Missouri Conservation Commission. Mohler replaces Howard Wood of Bonne Terre, whose six-year term expired in July. Pending approval by the state legislature, Mohler will serve until July 2009.

Mohler, 67, is a farmer and a native of Oregon County. He has a proven record of conserving forests, fish and wildlife and a history of building bridges between conservation and agriculture.

Mohler holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri's College of Agriculture. Since January 2001 he has served as director of the Missouri Department of Agriculture. He also has served as chief operating officer of the Missouri Farm Bureau, senior vice president and national board member of Ducks Unlimited, member of the Conservation Federation of Missouri and chairman of the University of Missouri School of Natural Resources Advisory Council.

Mohler has received the G. Andy Runge Award from the Missouri Chapter of the Wildlife Society and was named Master Conservationist by the Conservation Commission in 2001. He called the appointment "a natural fit."

The Conservation Commission and Conservation Department Director John Hoskins welcomed Mohler's appointment. "We've had a good working relationship

with the Department of Agriculture under Lowell's leadership," Hoskins said. "He will help foster the strong connection between conservation and agriculture."

The Conservation Commission, which oversees the management of Missouri's forest, fish and wildlife resources, is bipartisan, with two Democratic and two Republican members appointed by the governor. Mohler, a Republican, joins Commissioners Stephen Bradford of Cape Girardeau (D), Cynthia Metcalfe of St. Louis (D) and Anita Gorman of Kansas City (R).

Newly sworn-in Conservation Commissioner Lowell Mohler of Jefferson City is flanked by his wife, JoAnn (right), and Eastern District Court of Appeals federal judge Mary Rhodes Russell.



Green space conference headed to St. Louis

Missourians who want to keep their city landscapes green and inviting will be interested in the Green Space Design 2003 National Conference in St. Louis Oct. 20-21.

The conference, "Creating Patterns of Open Space: What Plans Are You Crafting for the Future?," is designed to help attendees meet the challenge of pursuing growth while preserving cultural, ecological, developmental, agricultural and recreational land values. Speakers will include experts on open space planning, environmentally sensitive development and improved regional patterns of growth.

Conference information is available at www.greenspacedesign.org or by calling 801/483-2100. The event is sponsored by the Center for Green Space Design, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping communities find practical ways to address open-space issues.

Show-Me eagles thriving

The number of eagles nesting in Missouri continues to rise, and the state's winter eagle population has stabilized.

The eagle count conducted early this year found more than 2,000 bald eagles in Missouri. An informal survey of eagle nests conducted this spring showed nearly 90 pairs of eagles nesting. In recent years, the number of nesting eagle pairs has increased by about 10 per year.

Eagles generally build their nests in the tops of the tallest trees along rivers or reservoirs. Enlarged annually, a bald eagle nest can become the largest of that built by any North American bird. The record is 20 feet deep and 10 feet wide. It weighed two tons.

The Conservation Department began bald eagle restoration in 1981. DDT and other chemicals contaminated eagles' food supplies, poisoning the birds or causing them to lay defective eggs. Loss of nesting habitat due to land use changes also reduced the number of areas suitable for eagle nesting. The banning of DDT and other pesticides and the reintroduction of bald eagles throughout the Midwest have helped the national bird make a comeback.



Jim Rathert

Win cash in Arbor Day poster contest

The Missouri Department of Conservation and the Missouri Community Forestry Council are asking all fifth-graders in Missouri to showcase their artistic talents by creating posters for the 2004 National Arbor Day poster contest.

The theme of the contest is "Trees are Terrific . . . in Cities and Towns." Through the contest, students will learn about the importance of trees to the environment.



2003 Winning Poster

Each school's winning poster will advance to the state competition. The state winner will receive a \$50 savings bond, and a 6- to 12-foot tree will be planted on the grounds of the winner's school. He or she may also attend Gov. Bob Holden's signing of the Missouri Arbor Day Proclamation at the Capitol in Jefferson City and enter the national contest.

The national winner will be announced on National Arbor Day, April 30, 2004. The winner will receive a \$1,000 savings

bond. The winner's teacher will receive \$200 for classroom materials.

The deadline for state contest submissions is Feb. 13. Packets with contest information will be sent to all fifth-grade art teachers. Teachers will receive free curriculum materials, including in-depth lesson plans, hands-on activities and contest information. Any fifth-grade teacher can obtain a packet by contacting Donna Baldwin, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102, baldwd@mdc.state.mo.us.



Jim Low

Grants available for Lewis & Clark events

Missourians interested in sponsoring educational programs about outdoor resources and the Lewis and Clark expedition can get financial help from the Missouri Department of Conservation. The Lewis and Clark Conservation Grant program provides assistance for Lewis and Clark bicentennial projects that connect citizens with our natural resources.

Local government agencies, organizations and individuals sponsoring Lewis and Clark projects are eligible for grants of up to \$15,000. Projects that secure matching funds will receive preference over those that do not have matching funds.

Community projects and events eligible for grants include those that promote resource stewardship, connect citizens with natural resources, promote eco-tourism or establish or improve facilities to be used during the bicentennial celebrations.

To apply for a Lewis and Clark Conservation Grant visit www.missouriconservation.org and use the key words "lc grants," or call 573/522-4115, ext. 3370. The deadline for grant applications is Nov. 14.

Roadside plantings provide savings and environmental benefits

A cooperative program between the Missouri departments of Conservation and Transportation (MODOT) seeks to spruce up highway roadsides with native plants.

Part of the money for roadside planting is being provided by a \$1 million U.S. Department of Transportation Roadside Enhancement Grant. The Conservation Department is providing \$200,000 in matching funds for the program.

Besides making roadways more attractive, the native grass and wildflower plantings will help the Conservation Department and MODOT meet important agency objectives while saving money. Native plants control erosion, and they save money because they require less frequent mowing. Using native plants also helps preserve the states' biological diversity.

Eight highways have been selected for native plant conversions. The roadside at the junction of Highway 291 and I-70 in Jackson County, I-35 near Bethany, Highway 71 north of Lamar, and Highway 54 near Kingdom City are scheduled for planting this fall. In a few years, motorists on these stretches of highway will be able to enjoy native grasses and a showy mix of wildflowers from late spring through early fall.

Some Missourians expressed concerns that native plants would attract deer to the roadways. However, research from several states shows that such plantings do not increase deer-vehicle collisions. In fact, collisions may be less frequent because deer are attracted to freshly mowed grass, and native plants require less mowing.

The same contractors who perform native plant installation on highways are ready to serve private landowners, too. If you are interested in establishing native plants on your property, visit the *Grow Native!* website www.grownative.org. The site has information that can help you design a landscaping plan, locate nurseries that sell native plants and find knowledgeable contractors.



Jim Low

NEWS & ALMANAC

continued

New patch identifies generous hunters

Every year, Missouri hunters donate tons of lean, savory venison to help people in need. This year, they will get something in return.

Every hunter who donates venison through an approved meat processor will receive a 2003 Share the Harvest patch. The iron-on patch, worn on a hunting cap, vest or coat, will mark the wearer as not only a successful deer hunter, but a generous one, too.

Last year alone, Missouri hunters donated 48 tons of venison through approved locker plants. The meat goes to food banks for distribution to the needy.

This year, participating processors will give every hunter who donates venison a Share the Harvest patch. Those who donate whole deer also can get a \$25 rebate coupon. The Conserva-

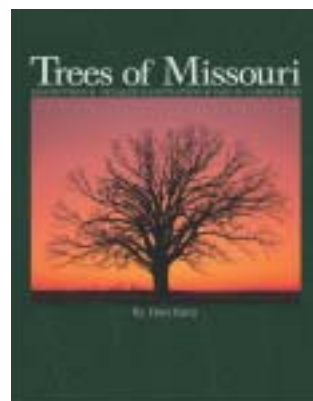
tion Federation of Missouri will redeem the coupon to help pay for processing.

Although Share the Harvest is a statewide program, it is organized and operated at the local level by civic clubs or sporting groups.

The first step in setting up a Share the Harvest program is to find at least one deer processor and one charitable agency to participate in the program. The organizing group then contacts the local conservation agent who certifies the local program.

To learn if your area has a Share the Harvest program, or to create one, contact the nearest Conservation Department regional office. And

wear your patch with pride while spreading the word that Missouri deer hunters are helping the needy.



Get your Trees of Missouri book signed

Don Kurz, author of *Trees of Missouri*, will present a slide show and talk about interesting features of various trees at a book signing from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Oct. 10 at Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center. He will talk about plant names, their medicinal uses and wildlife benefits and his new book, as well as his other books: *Ozark Wildflowers*, *Scenic Driving the Ozarks*, including the *Ouachita Mountains*, and *Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri*. For reservations, call 314/301-1500.

Nature quilting program off and running

The Wildlifers Program at the G. Andy Runge Conservation Nature Center (CNC) in Jefferson City is truly a patchwork affair. The program, which began in 1998, blends nature learning with the art and craft of quilt making.

The group has the distinction of being one of Missouri's most exclusive conservation programs. You have to be at least 50 years old to join.

Nevertheless, the program has grown quickly. This year the Runge Center expanded its nature quilting program to four groups, with a total of 140 participants. Furthermore, Powder Valley CNC in Kirkwood and Burr Oak Woods CNC in Blue Springs now have Wildlifers groups, too.

The appeal of the program is threefold. First, it's educational. Participants learn about topics ranging from raccoons and wildflowers to the Lewis and Clark bicentennial in the monthly gatherings. They also enjoy socializing with others who share interests in nature and the very practical craft of quilt making. Finally, their activities produce tangible reminders of lessons learned and friendships made.

At each meeting, Wildlifers receive the materials needed to make a quilt block. Informative programs help them learn about the subjects of the blocks, while busy hands fashion them. Continued work at home turns the blocks into heirloom-quality bedcovers for the makers' homes, friends, nieces, nephews, grandchildren and other lucky recipients.

In recent years, the blocks made over the course of a year have revolved around a central theme, such as wildflowers. This spring, Wildlifers completed a series focusing on the Lewis and Clark expedition. An April exhibition showcasing the resulting quilts at the Runge CNC drew nearly 1,000 visitors.

The programs appeal apparently extends well beyond the Jefferson City area. Runge Wildlifers participants come from as far away as St. Louis, Rolla and Sedalia. Program coordinators Nadine Marshall and Carolyn Brunner also have received inquiries from Powder Valley CNC in Kirkwood, Burr Oak Woods CNC in Blue Springs, Oxley Nature Center in Louisiana, and even from the state of California.



Jim Low

Saline County farmer makes room for quail

David Copeland faces the same pressures as other farmers. Unlike many others, however, he has a thriving quail population on his land. The difference is that he believes quail are worth a little room.

It's not that Copeland can afford to think exclusively of quail. Like anyone else, he has to watch the bottom line, but he has found ways to make room for game birds while keeping his land profitable.

Copeland and his wife raised their two sons on the same farm his father operated in Saline County. Aerial photos of the area from 20 and 50 years ago show striking changes. Fields increased. Fencerows disappeared. Pastures swallowed up small wood lots. Ballooning crop fields pinched back brushy draws to pencil-thin lines around creeks, ponds and roads as farmers plowed up wildlife habitat to get more cropland. Copeland doubts the wisdom of that trade-off.

"I don't see the sense in mowing or plowing right up to the edge of ditches and fencerows," he said. "A lot of that is marginal land, and it doesn't add up to any significant acreage."

When the federal Conservation Reserve Program came along in the 1980s, Copeland saw a way to take this marginal land back out of production. Doing so yielded more than quail habitat. Native grass waterways and permanently vegetated filter strips helped him stop soil erosion, and that improved water quality in his ponds.

"I guarantee you, these 22 acres that I have in filter strips are making me more money than I made farming them," he says. "Too many farmers never

bother to put a pencil to the economics of clearing and farming marginal land."

There is a lot farmers can do for quail that doesn't require much expense or loss of productivity. Copeland has gone from having one or two coveys each year to finding between five and eight. He considers that a good return on a little investment.

"I figure if I can't save up an acre here and there for quail and deer then what's the use of being a farmer?" Copeland asked. "I get as much enjoyment from wildlife as I do from my work."

Copeland said his family spent every weekend hunting or fishing when he was growing up. Fewer farm families do that today, he added, and so wildlife isn't as important to them as it used to be.

"I farm three times the acreage that my dad did to make a living, and I have a lot less free time," Copeland said. "I think that's partly why people 'clean out' their land. That's naturally what you are going to do if you are under pressure to get every bit of production you can from your land, and you don't have time to enjoy the benefits that go with brushy draws."

"I figure I've replaced as much, if not more, habitat than I've taken out," he said. "A farmer's motto ought to be to leave his ground in better shape than when he got it. I want to do the same for wildlife. An acre here and there isn't going to break me. Meanwhile, we get to kill turkeys every year, and my boys come home to hunt."

Jim Low



There's something fishy about these hawks

Call them Cingular and Nokia. The osprey chicks growing up in a unique location in northeastern Missouri are the latest characters in a saga that began nearly a decade ago.

Senior Conservation Agent Tom Skinner spotted their nest last spring on a cellular-telephone transmission tower south of Jacksonville. The location was unusual because ospreys - also known as fish hawks - normally nest in trees within sight of large bodies of water.

The tower was miles from the nearest spot where the Conservation Department reintro-



Jim Rafter

duced ospreys several years ago. However, it was close enough to a private lake to provide food for the growing chicks.

The ospreys' willingness to branch out from the original release site is encouraging. As ospreys released by the Conservation Department disperse and multiply, so do opportunities to see them.

Other osprey reintroduction areas included Mark Twain Lake near Hannibal, Pony Express Lake near St. Joseph, Montrose Lake near Clinton and Truman Lake at Warsaw. If you visit these areas in the summer, look skyward now and then. You might catch a glimpse of the dividends accruing from Missouri's restoration investment.



Jim Rafter

Surplus property auction set for Oct. 18

All-terrain vehicles, pickup trucks, boats, farm equipment and office furniture are among items to be auctioned off Oct. 18 at Brookfield.

Conservation Department auctions typically include sport-utility vehicles, sedans, tractors, lawn mowers and office equipment, such as copiers, furniture, calculators, cameras and air conditioners. Auction items will be on display from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Oct. 17 and at 8 a.m. Oct. 18. The auctions begin at 10 a.m. All property must be paid for on the day of the sale. Acceptable forms of payment include cash, MasterCard, Visa and personal checks with proper identification. For lists of sale items, call the Conservation Department General Services Division at 573/522 4115, ext. 3279 or 3283.

NEWS & ALMANAC

continued

Outdoor Calendar

HUNTING	OPEN	CLOSE
Coyotes	5/12/03	3/31/04
Deer, Urban Deer Management Portion	10/25/03	10/26/03
in units 58 and 59— Antlerless Only —archery, crossbow and muzzleloader only		
Deer, Firearms, Youth Season	11/1/03	11/2/03
Resident Only		
Deer, Firearms	11/15/03	11/25/03
	12/13/03	12/21/03
December season open only in units 1-27, 33-38, 58 & 59— Antlerless Only		
Deer, Muzzleloader	11/28/03	12/7/03
Deer/Turkey, Archery	10/1/03	11/14/03
	11/26/03	1/15/04
Turkey, Fall Firearms	10/13/03	10/26/03
Squirrels	5/24/03	1/15/04
Pheasants		
North Zone	11/1/03	1/15/04
Southeast Zone	12/1/03	12/12/03
Quail	11/1/03	1/15/04
Rabbits	10/1/03	2/15/04
Ruffed Grouse	10/15/03	1/15/04
Furbearers	11/20/03	1/20/04
Groundhogs	5/12/03	12/15/03
Doves	9/1/03	11/9/03
Sora & Virginia Rails	9/1/03	11/9/03
Common Snipe	9/1/03	12/16/03
Woodcock	10/15/03	11/28/03
Crows	11/1/03	3/3/04
Teal	9/6/03	9/21/03

FISHING

Black Bass (most southern streams)	5/24/03	2/29/04
Trout Parks	3/1/03	10/31/03
Bullfrog & Green Frog	Sunset 6/30/03	Midnight 10/31/03
Nongame Fish Stream Giggling	9/15/03	1/31/04

TRAPPING

Beaver	11/20/03	3/31/04
Coyote	11/20/03	2/20/04
Otters & Muskrats	11/20/03	Varies
see regulations for other zones, limits and dates		
Other Furbearers	11/20/03	1/20/04

For complete information about seasons, limits, methods and restrictions, consult the *Wildlife Code* and the current summaries of *Missouri Hunting and Trapping Regulations* and *Missouri Fishing Regulations*, the *Fall Deer and Turkey Hunting Information*, *Waterfowl Hunting Digest* and the *Migratory Bird Digest*. To find this information on our Web site go to <http://www.conservation.state.mo.us/regs/>.

The Conservation Department's computerized point-of-sale system allows you to purchase or replace your permits through local vendors or by phone. The toll-free number is 800/392-4115. Allow 10 days for delivery of telephone purchases. To purchase permits online go to <http://www.wildlifelicenses.com/mo/>.



Jim Rathert

Stay safe during fall turkey season

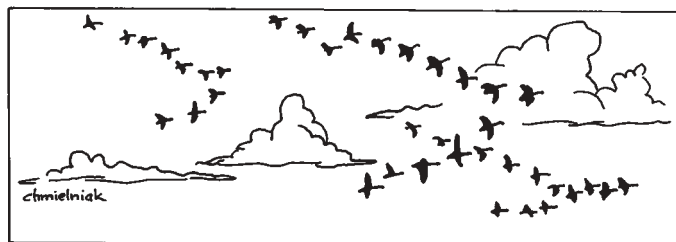
Both hunters and non-hunters should keep safety in mind during the fall firearms turkey hunting season, which runs Oct. 13-26.

Most of Missouri's firearms-related turkey hunting accidents occur during the spring season, mainly because far fewer Missourians take part in the fall event. The nature of the sport—fully camouflaged hunters sitting perfectly still while trying to sound like turkeys—makes safety-consciousness extremely important. And because many people besides turkey hunters also enjoy being outdoors in October, birdwatchers, hikers, nature photographers and anglers all need to be cautious.

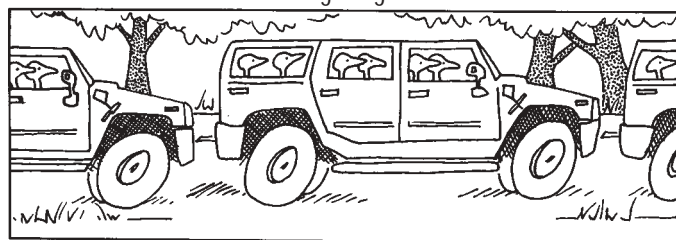
If you are a turkey hunter, always wear a fluorescent orange vest and cap when walking to and from hunting spots. Choose hunting sites that offer good visibility in front of you, and if you see another hunter, shout to identify yourself. Never wave. The movement of your camouflaged form could draw fire from a careless shooter. When hunting, sit with your back to a tree trunk or other protective cover.

Most important, before pulling the trigger, identify your target positively and look beyond it to ensure that no people or livestock are in the line of fire. If you kill a turkey, put it in an orange vest or other covering before leaving the woods. Carrying an exposed turkey over your shoulder can cause you to be mistaken for game.

If you aren't a turkey hunter, you should also wear orange garments when in the woods during fall turkey season. Avoid wearing red, white or blue garments, as these colors are seen on adult turkey's heads and can lead to being mistaken for game. Tie a bell to your belt to alert hunters to your approach, and never try to sneak up on a calling turkey. Even if the sound is coming from a real bird, entering an area with turkeys increases the risk of intruding on a hunt.



Geese migrating in vees



Geese migrating in Humvees



Program Schedule

Television the way Nature intended!

Broadcast Stations

Columbia KOMU (Ch 8 NBC) / Sundays 11:00 a.m.

Hannibal KHQA (Ch 7 CBS) / Weekends, check local listing for times

Joplin KOZJ (Ch 26 PBS) / Saturdays 2:00 p.m.

Kansas City KCPT (Ch 19 PBS) / Sundays 7:00 a.m.

Kirkville KTVO (Ch 3 ABC) / Saturdays 5:00 a.m.

St. Joseph KQTV (Ch 2 ABC) / Weekends, check local listings for times

St. Louis KSDK (Ch 5 NBC) / Sundays, 4:30 a.m.

Springfield KOZK (Ch 21 PBS) / Saturdays 2:00 p.m.

Warrensburg KMOS (Ch 6 PBS) / Sundays 6:30 p.m.

Cable Stations

Branson Vacation Channel / Fri., Sat. 8:00 p.m.

Brentwood Brentwood City TV / Daily, check local listing for times

Cape Girardeau Charter Cable Ed. Ch. 23 / Thursdays 6:00 p.m.

Chillicothe Time Warner Cable Channel 6 / Wednesdays 7:00 p.m.

Hillsboro JCTV / Mondays 12 p.m. & 6 p.m.

Independence City 7 / Thurs. 2 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m. & Sundays 8 p.m.

Joplin KGCS / Sundays 6 p.m.

Mexico Mex-TV / Fridays 6:30 p.m. & Saturdays 6:30 p.m.

Noel TTV / Fridays 4:30 p.m.

O'Fallon City of O'Fallon Cable / Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

Parkville City of Parkville / First and third Tuesdays of the month 6:30 p.m.

Perryville PVTv / Mondays 6 p.m.

Poplar Bluff City Cable-Channel 2 / Tues. 7:30 p.m. & Saturdays 10:00 a.m.

Raymore Govt. Access-Channel 7 / Various, check local listings for times

Raytown City of Raytown Cable / Wed. 10:00 a.m. & Saturdays 8:00 p.m.

St. Charles City of St. Charles-Ch 20 / Tues. 5:00 p.m. and Wed. 10:00 a.m.

St. Louis Charter Communications / Saturdays 10:30 a.m.

St. Louis City TV 10 / Mondays 11:30 a.m., Wednesdays 3:30 p.m.

St. Louis Cooperating School Districts / Wednesdays 9 a.m.

St. Louis DHTV-21 / Mondays 10:30 a.m.

St. Louis KPTN-LP/TV58 / Thursdays 10:00 a.m.

St. Peters City of St. Peters Cable / Various, check local listings for times

Ste. Genevieve Public TV / Fridays 1 p.m., 6 p.m. & 12 midnight

Springfield KBLE36 / Nine times a week, check local listing for times

Sullivan Fidelity Cable-Channel 6 / Wed. 11:00 a.m. and Fri. 7:00 p.m.

Union TRC-TV7 / Tuesdays 3:00 p.m.

West Plains OCTV / Mondays 6:30 p.m.

Meet our Contributors



Freelance writer **Joan Banks** watches blackbirds at her home southeast of Joplin. She has written three articles for *Outside In*, the children's section of the *Conservationist*.

Thomas W. Blackburn, P.E., was raised in St. Louis but says he spent many memorable days on Granny and Grandpa's Steelville farm, where he hunted, fished, swam, fixed fence, cut wood, pulled weeds and raced sticks down the creek. He is now a civil engineer in the state of California and enjoys outdoor adventures with his own kids, Donald, Amy and Isaac.



Bill Heatherly has been a wildlife programs supervisor at the Conservation Department's central office in Jefferson City since February 1997. Before then, he spent two years as an urban wildlife specialist, resolving deer and other wildlife-related problems in the Kansas City area.

Tom Hutton lives in Jefferson City and supervises the Wildlife Damage and Grassland Programs for Private Land Services Division. He spent 22 years of his Conservation Department career helping manage prairies, glades, savannas, forests and wetlands, and six years helping the public with wildlife damage problems. He enjoys hunting, bird watching, camping, canoeing, photography, farming and working with bird dogs.



Wildlife biologist **Brad McCord** is the Conservation Department's Private Land Programs Coordinator. He works with state, federal and private conservation organizations to improve fish, forest, and wildlife habitats. Brad resides in California with his wife, Jennifer, and daughter, Sarah. When not on the family farm near Farmington, Brad enjoys wildlife art, antique decoys and all outdoor pursuits.

John Wick was raised on a Pennsylvania farm but has resided in Missouri since 1976. He has a cow/calf beef cattle operation in Montgomery City, and he founded a company that designs and manufactures apparel and products for people who hunt with dogs. A nationally-known coonhound breeder, trainer and writer, he also enjoys hunting deer.





Jim Rathert

Natural High

Stegall Mountain Natural Area in Carter County contains a rich complex of igneous glades. Visitors to the area this fall can amble among small, pink-hued rhyolite boulders interspersed with pockets of colorful sumac and little bluestem. — *Jim Rathert*